

## Abshire wins Wharf To Wharf duel

### Gain was worth the pain for champ of men's race

By ED VYEDA  
Sentinel sports editor

CAPITOLA — Three months ago, Brian Abshire had serious doubts about his running career. He'd been to the Olympics, as the No. 1 United States steeplechase runner last summer in Seoul, but he'd also been put through a lot of pain to get there. At age 25, he wasn't sure if the gain was worth the strain any longer.

"I was about to retire," Absire said of his attitude last spring. But he moved from San Diego back home to the Sacramento area and began working with American River College track coach Al Baeta. Things started to click.

Sunday morning, Abshire, who built his reputation on the track, showed that not only is he physically fit, but he's mentally prepared to push himself toward new horizons again.

"It was fun," said Abshire, 25, who won an entertaining duel in the 17th annual Wharf To Wharf Race in a record time of 27 minutes, 45 seconds on the 6-mile course from the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf to Capitola Village. "Of course, it's easy to say now. With two miles to go, I didn't think it was so much fun."

At the 4-mile mark, while Alan Dehlenger of Reno was trying to break off what had been a lengthy and tense duel, Abshire had reason to be concerned. "I had such bad stomach cramps, I thought I was going to die," Abshire said.

But pain hasn't stopped Abshire before. Just before the 1984 Olympic Trials, competing in a 1,500-meter race, Abshire broke his tibia with 300 meters to go —but didn't break stride in clocking what was the equivalent of a 4:05 mile. That's a mean threshold of pain; one that some stomach cramps won't threaten.

### At the finish

The top men's and women's finishers of Sunday's Wharf To Wharf race:

#### MEN

1. Brian Abshire .....	27:45
2. Alan Dehlenger .....	27:54
3. Rich McCandless .....	28:34
4. Alfred Lara .....	28:44
5. Robert Anex .....	28:46
6. Joe Rubio .....	29:08
7. Jose Aispuro .....	29:09
8. Robert Tapia .....	29:14
9. Ivo Rodrigues .....	29:15
10. Greg Rivera .....	29:18

#### WOMEN

1. Lynn Nelson .....	31:42
2. Patti Gray .....	32:12
3. Rosa Gutierrez .....	32:18
4. Leslie Lewis .....	33:02
5. Barb Myers-Acosta .....	33:22
6. Terry Puckett .....	33:49
7. Peggy Smyth .....	34:03
8. Unknown .....	
9. Karen Scholte .....	34:12
10. Tracy Leichter .....	34:33

Sunday, with  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile to go in one of the most dramatic matchups in Wharf To Wharf Race history, Abshire finally pulled away from Dehlenger.

"I'm in better shape than I thought," said Abshire, who was greeted in Capitola Village by a large and appreciative crowd.

Dehlenger, 26, who has been one of the hottest runners on the Pacific Association TAC series lately, finished second in 27:54 to equal the course record set last year by Matt Clayton.

Rich McCandless, 33, of Fremont was third in 28:34, with Alfred Lara of Fresno fourth at 28:44 and Rob Anex of Athlerton fifth in 28:46.

Jose Aispuro of Aptos was the



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

It was clearly a two-man race between winner Brian Abshire, left, and Alan Dehlenger by the time they got to 24th Avenue.

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# Men/ Surge at end wins race

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top local finisher, placing seventh in 29:09.

Clayton, the defending champ, was running with a sore left knee but still placed 20th, in 29:39.

The elite competitors were joined by more than 12,000 runners of all ages, shapes and sizes, in one of the smoothest-running races the Wharf To Wharf has ever had. Rainbow-like arches of balloons marked each mile mark, adding a festive touch along the course, with plenty of live rock bands lending their particular flair to the event.

"When you get a little tired, or you get kind of in a rut, it helps," Abshire said of the music. The gallery he lined the course played a part in his effort, too. "I try to block a lot of things out, but I could hear what was going on. 'It does help. I heard people yell, 'You're on a record pace.' I didn't know that. People out there know the race; they've been looking at it all the years they've had it."

For the first 24 minutes of the race, Abshire and Dehlenger were like Siamese twins, joined together in competition. Although neither runner knew the other, both knew one thing: Abshire hadn't run a 6-mile road race since 1986 — when he was still in college at Alabama — but if he was at the front with a mile to go, he had an advantage.

"I figured, if I stayed with him up to the last mile, I would probably have it because of my speed," said Abshire, who earlier this year ran 7:45 for 3,000 meters (the second-

fastest by an American outdoors) and turned in a 3:57 mile during a training session this spring. "I was confident going in, but not overconfident, because 6 miles is a long way when you haven't done it for a while."

"Brian has come off a great track season," Dehlenger said of Abshire, a member of Athletics West and Nike who recently returned from the European circuit. "I knew he had a kick. If I didn't get a good lead on him going down the hill (into Capitola Village), I'd be in trouble."

The race started with a non-elite runner, Terry Nephew of Clovis, darting out to a rabbit start for the first mile. "He went like crazy," Abshire said. "But I figured he was just blowing smoke." Hitting the 1-mile mark near the East Cliff trestle in 4:34, a foursome of Abshire, Dehlenger, McCandless and 1987 Pan American Games marathon gold medalist Ivo Rodriguez joined the lead and quickly hopped up the pace, leaving the rabbit behind.

The group adroitly dodged a real animal — a dog that wandered in front of them at Seabright Beach — and by the time the leaders turned onto Murray Street, the four-man race had turned into the Abshire-Dehlenger Show. They hit the 2-mile mark at the yacht harbor in 9:09, and remained in step at the halfway point in 13:49 — a record pace, at 4:39 a mile.

"I told myself that if I was with the leaders at 3 miles — and I figured there would be a lot more

leaders — I could possibly win it," Abshire said. "If you want to have a good time, you can't sit back and play games," Abshire said of his trademark approach of going to the front. "You prepare a lot for a race — from eating, sleeping and stretching — so you want to go out there and give it all you've got."

At 21st Avenue, the co-leaders were 100 yards in front of everyone else, and extending their gap. Soon, as the two hit 4 miles in 18:31, Dehlenger made an escape move.

"I tried to break him a little bit, but it didn't work," said Dehlenger, who gained only about 10 yards for only about 10 seconds, as Abshire came right back at him.

"I thought he was going to break it open, but it was still a little early kind the race to do that," Abshire said.

For Dehlenger, whose body is still recovering a bit from winning the Oakland 20K two weeks ago, there was only one thing left to do: "Hold on," he said.

As the two approached Opal Cliffs, Abshire — running comfortably and beginning to zone in on a course-record effort — took control. When he charged to a 20-yard lead, Dehlenger was defenseless. "It wasn't so much Brian surging that it was me blowing up," Dehlenger said.

"It was no dramatic thing, it just happened to be toward the end," Abshire said of his key surge. "He would have done it if I didn't. So I thought I'd get the upper hand on him."